

# MCC Committee on Women's Concerns report



Report #53, January-February 1984

## Mennonite Women and Home Missions

compiled by Lois Barrett

When Mennonite women were not welcome to minister in their home congregations, they could be missionaries overseas. When they could not vote in "brotherhood" meetings in their home communities, they could participate in decision making, teach, pray and serve on the foreign mission field.

Some of these "foreign" fields were in North America: among Indians (the Cheyenne, Arapaho and Hopi), in cities (in 1920 considered "foreign" because of the vast numbers of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe), and in rural mountain missions, among people who were economically poor and culturally different from flatland Americans.

The foreignness of these mission fields is illustrated in an article by H.H. Van Meter, superintendent of evangelistic work of the Chicago Christian Endeavor Union, quoted with favor in *The Christian Evangel*, the periodical of the Central Conference of Mennonites, in September 1910:

*The Bible is not only under the ban in our public schools, be it remembered, but is under the same dire influence in thousands of homes of our foreign-born population. To them we are as much bound to take the message of salvation as we are to bear or to send it across the sea to the heathen world beyond, where I myself was born... but God has brought a great foreign mission to our doors.*

From the beginnings of these missions, between 1880 and 1930, Mennonite women—like other Protestant women missionaries—served alongside men. To be sure, few of them preached Sunday morning sermons or baptized, but they led Bible studies, called door to door, handled mission finances, worked in medical clinics, visited jails and hospitals and organized Sunday schools.

### City Missions

City missions, like other "foreign" missions, provided a special place for single women. Denied leadership roles in the established Mennonite congregations, single women missionaries flourished in the city missions.

Catherine Niswander, for example, was in 1914 one of the first missionaries at the General Conference Mennonite mission in Chicago. Through seven ministerial changes in the church, Niswander took charge. She did visitation; she saw to it that there were preachers (men) for morning and evening services; she managed funds and bought a mission house with two apartments.

In Portland, Oregon, where she transferred in 1928, she was the only full-time worker in her nine years there. An anniversary booklet from the First Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, where she later served, listed her as "superintendent" in Portland.

"I did all except the preaching," she said—including the janitorial work for the church building.

In Philadelphia she did get a chance for occasional preaching when the minister, J.J. Plenert, was gone.

"And so a number of times I had the sermon," Niswander told me. "Rev. Plenert told me that one time he had asked a deacon how he liked my sermon, and the deacon had told him, 'It's the best sermon I've heard in a long time.' Rev. Plenert had laughed, and then the man had said, 'Oh, I don't mean it that way—I mean, of the people we've had to get in to preach.'"

In the Mennonite Church's Chicago mission, Melinda Ebersole was the first "permanent" worker, serving from 1894 to 1914. Trained as a nurse, she did visitation work, helped with cottage prayer meetings, taught Sunday school classes, and worked in the medical dispensary. In his 1931 history of the Mennonites in Illinois, Harry F. Weber lists her among the ministers.

Many years later, writes Elaine Sommers Rich in *Mennonite Women*, Bishop A.C. Good remembered how Melinda Ebersole had encouraged him when he delivered his first sermon. The regular speaker had not shown up for a Wednesday evening prayer meeting, and young A.C. substituted by doing an impromptu exposition of a text of Scripture. Afterward Melinda, whom he called "the mother of the mission," said to him, "It was a good speech."

## Mountain Missions

In the mountain missions, women also found a place. Nellie Coffman served in West Virginia from 1926 to 1933 under the Middle District of the Virginia Conference. She and her niece Lora Heatwole began Bible schools:

*Visited in the mountain homes, walking miles on the mountain trails, crossing streams on foot logs, and where there were none, took off their shoes and waded through the streams. They were often out three or four days, eating meals and spending nights in the homes of the people who warmly welcomed them. They brought encouragement and hope to the sick and elderly, taught in the Sunday schools, and often planned and conducted evening services. (Elaine Sommers Rich, **Mennonite Women**, p. 164).*

Married women were often granted more responsibility in city, mountain or Indian missions than at home. Among the influential Mennonite women in Indian missions was Bertha Kinsinger. She came to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) as a General Conference Mennonite missionary in 1896.

A college graduate with both bachelor's and master's degrees, Kinsinger studied Latin, Greek, German, philosophy, calculus and logic. She came to Cantonment as a teacher of Indian children.

One of the first single women to make a career of Mennonite missions, Kinsinger and her friend Agnes Williams, whom she had recruited to the mission field from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, were in charge of the Clinton mission field for two years when no men were available for the work. Kinsinger and Williams conducted funerals, preached sermons and led worship services. Kinsinger visited Cheyenne camps on horseback and later with a small buggy and team.

Kinsinger married Rodolphe Petter, a widowed missionary, with whom she had been collaborating on a Cheyenne-English dictionary. After their marriage and a move to new Indian mission work in Montana, Bertha continued to assist, protect and promote Rodolphe's linguistic work. After his death in 1947, she remained on the mission field—despite mission board protests—until her retirement in 1963.

## End of Golden Age

This golden age of women missionaries in North America began to fade in the 1930s and 1940s. Funds available for home missions decreased during the Depression. In the General Conference, funds were diverted from the cities to help support ministers from among the thousands of new Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada.

In 1942, when a young woman, soon to graduate from Fort Wayne Bible School, applied to the General Conference Home Mission Board concerning missionary work, the board discouraged her by saying, "We have only one such [woman] worker, Miss Niswander."

Since World War II, Mennonite women in home missions have been primarily ministers' wives or voluntary service workers.

The voluntary service program, begun with Mennonite Central Committee and the two larger Mennonite conferences soon after World War II, has always had a high proportion of women volunteers—even in years when men were being drafted into alternative service in the United States.

Especially in summer service programs, women have predominated, some years outnumbering men by seven to one. Until June 1957, all four of the General Conference voluntary service directors had been women: Bertha Fast (Harder), Erna Friesen (Graber), Edith Claassen (Graber) and Leola Schultz.

This issue of the *Report* tells a small part of the story of Mennonite women in home missions: Clara Brubaker Shank, a rural missionary in Missouri; Elizabeth Foth, a city missionary unwilling to work under mission board restrictions; Anna Reimer Schlichting, modern church planter among Hispanics in California; and the almost forgotten deaconess movement.

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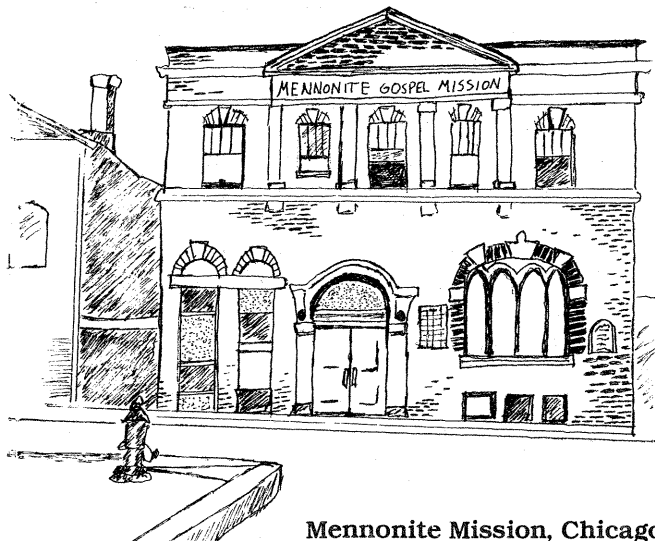
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Mennonite Mission, Chicago

## Clara Brubaker Shank: Interacting With Her Times

by Priscilla Stuckey-Kauffman

The life of Clara Brubaker Shank deserves attention as one of the many women whose leadership has gone unrecognized by Mennonite historians. One of the most influential rural missionaries in Missouri, Clara was also one of the most prolific contributors to church periodicals. She worked actively in church planting, Sunday school organization and missions support, in addition to teaching school.

### Religious and Cultural Milieu

Clara was born into a century in which fervent revivalism mingled with romantic notions of woman's nature. Revivalism represented a triumph of heart religion, where emotions gained acceptance as windows to truth. Jesus was embraced as the loving, self-sacrificing mediator between humanity and God. At the same time, Victorian America elevated womanhood to a spiritual pedestal, calling her to humanize brute male society.

Barbara Welter, in *Dimity Convictions* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976) quotes from nineteenth-century women's magazines: woman possessed "the vestal flame of piety, lighted up by Heaven in her breast," a flame which burned brightest when its vessel kept herself at home promoting the morality of husband and children. Yet woman was also to be dependent. "True feminine genius," wrote one woman, "is ever timid, doubtful and clingingly dependent; a perpetual childhood."

Welter also explores the relationship between sentimental language about woman's place and the warm piety of revivalism. She observes that the new interpretation of Christ as the loving sacrificial victim corresponded to the experience of as well as the social expectations placed on women. As an example she cites the revivalist hymn, "Just As I Am," with its language of self-effacement and absorption into Christ, which was written by a woman. Clearly, women welcomed the language and concepts of revivalism because, consciously or not, they could identify with them out of their own experience.

A scanning of the *Herald of Truth* (first published in 1864, a forerunner of the *Gospel Herald*) shows that most writers discussed the traditional Mennonite theme of following the commands of Scripture in daily life. Many warnings appeared against conforming to the world, encouraging instead plain dress (for both men and women) and a simple lifestyle.

But some writers adopted the themes and language of revivalist piety, drawing vivid contrast between the glories of heaven and the torments of hell. Some defined peace as tranquility of the heart brought about by conversion. Others, especially women, expressed devotion to Jesus in intimate terms. Wrote one, "Have we not at times been filled with a sweet sinking into his arms of love, willing to do and bear anything for his sake?" (Anna Yoder, *Herald of Truth* 21 (1884), 307).

### Clara: 1869-1895

Born in 1869 to John and Maggie Brubaker of Missouri, Clara was early exposed to the rigors of a small frontier congregation through her father, who was ordained minister when she was seven. The church lay in the circuit regularly visited by John S. Coffman, the pioneer evangelist in the Mennonite Church. John taught traditional Mennonite emphases of simplicity and obedience, along with a revivalist emphasis on heart conversion. He became Clara's mentor, encouraging her to write and to attend the new Elkhart Institute (forerunner of Goshen College). Some delightful letters from Clara lie in the J.S. Coffman Collection in the Archives at Goshen.

Clara's first article was published in the *Herald of Truth* when she was only 17. In the next 10 years she contributed 42 short devotional pieces to the paper. Her favorite themes were love for Christ, the sacrificial victim, and love for one's neighbor expressed through service and concern for lost souls.

Like her mentor, Clara also held together traditional Mennonite emphases with the newer message of "true heart conversion." Unlike some of her Mennonite sisters, Clara never used sentimental or intimate language to express devotion to Christ. She instead stressed "bearing one another's burdens" as a response to God's love.

### Clara: 1896-1925

At the age of 16 Clara had begun teaching school, and she continued in this profession for nearly 40 years. In 1895 she honed educational skills through a year's work at the Elkhart Institute.

From Elkhart Clara moved to southern Missouri, where her family had begun a mission-colonizing project. Clara sank her energies into the new settlement and congregation. In 1897 she donated land she had bought to be used for building a school, and upon its completion, she became the first teacher.

She also played an active though unofficial role in pastoring the congregation. Her letters to J.S. Coffman at the time reveal her concerns for the people who attended the small church. She also taught Sunday school and presented essays at the newly-organized Sunday school conferences in Missouri and Iowa.

Clara exercised her leadership within the bounds prescribed by the church of the time. The new spirit of revivalism resulted not only in warm piety but also in new church institutions. Many of these new activities—teaching Sunday school, writing, attending college, going overseas as missionaries—were open to women as well as men. But leadership positions were defined by men as outside women's sphere.

The church was influenced in the Victorian era which sentimentalized woman's moral perfection and urged her to influence it over a naughty world. Thus the

church invited women to fill roles which influenced the young, the ignorant and the backsliders—but forbade women to exercise decisive leadership. Women's moral influence was designed to undergird male leadership. In 1895, for instance, the Missouri Sunday School Conference decreed that sisters "have the right to teach [Sunday school] but not to usurp authority" (*Herald of Truth* 32 (1895), 315).

In the early 1900s *Gospel Herald* writers popularized among Mennonites the nineteenth-century Victorian images of woman. One woman declared that a true woman would act as a civilizing influence on her ferocious, savage, ill-mannered male associates (*Gospel Herald* 7 (1915), 675-676).

Clara's 34 articles during this period of her adult life focused more explicitly on Mennonite doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance. Clara believed that plain dress would present the vision of a unified church to unbelievers. And she decried Christian participation in war because it caused unbelievers to have less confidence in Christianity. Thus her adherence to both church doctrines was rooted in the practical and missionary concern for those outside the church.

Throughout her adult life Clara continued to teach school and to help shepherd the congregations she attended. As an unmarried eldest daughter, she also fulfilled the expected duty of caring for her aging parents. After they died in the early 1920s, a long-time friend and minister, John R. Shank, approached Clara on the question of marriage. J.R. was also a native of Missouri who had spent his adult life pastoring struggling home missions congregations in the state. J.R. and Clara had met at least 30 years earlier at church conferences, and J.R. had remained a friend of Clara's family. In 1925 they were married, when Clara was 55 and John 47 years old.

#### Clara: 1925-1958

After her marriage, Clara retired from teaching and devoted her time to making a living in the Ozark hills

### Elizabeth Foth and the Hoyt Street Gospel Hall

by Lots Barrett

Elizabeth Foth, born among the Russian Mennonite communities in central Kansas, had wanted to be a missionary to India. But she felt God's call to city missions and became the first paid missionary in Altoona, Pa., under the General Conference Mennonite Home Mission Board.

When Foth arrived in 1918, she found a mission already started under the auspices of the nearby rural Roaring Spring Mennonite Church. It was supervised by Jacob Snyder, elder in Roaring Spring with deacon L.L. Shaw conducting most of the services.

Foth was joined in the mission work the following year by Martha Franz and, in 1921, by Gerhard M. and Ruth Foth Baergen. The mission bustled with Sunday

and accompanying J.R. on pastoral visits. She continued to share people's needs, and apparently took in several foster children. Home mission work progressed slowly, however, in part because J.R. made few concessions on the doctrine of dress to accommodate the culture of the hill people (Theron Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980), p. 159).

While J.R.'s prominence in the Mennonite Church grew after their marriage (he was ordained bishop in 1941), Clara retreated from the public domain. Only two articles by her appear in the *Gospel Herald* after 1925.

This was the era in which fundamentalistic influences persuaded church leaders to curb women's activities. In addition, Clara voluntarily took on the church's restricted role for women and especially wives. A sister-in-law who lived with Clara and J.R. for several years observed that Clara, after her marriage, was interested in being not a leader, but a helper. Yet she retained her support for evangelism and her pastoral concern for others until her death in 1958.

#### Conclusion

From the perspective of the 1980s, Clara possessed the training and abilities suited to the role of ordained minister. She was an experienced schoolteacher, a vocation which supplied the church with many ministers, including her mentor J.S. Coffman, her brother and her husband. She led in Sunday school activities. She showed more theological awareness than many men and most women of her time, judging by her 78 articles in church papers. She practiced pastoral care and never faltered in her zeal for missions.

It remains for our generation to lament the restrictions placed upon her by her time. But we also rejoice in the nurturing and leadership roles which she fulfilled and to which her life still speaks.

school, Christian Endeavor, Junior League, Bible studies, cottage prayer meetings, midweek prayer meetings, and distribution of clothing.

#### Trouble in Coupon

In 1921 Foth and Franz expanded their work to Coupon, a mountain town nine miles outside Altoona. Their new project proved controversial, for Jacob Snyder began accusing them of claiming their ordinations as missionaries as proof of their right to minister fully in Coupon.

Snyder complained to the General Conference Home Mission Board, of which he was a member, "I am writing this letter in reference to the lady workers on the field, that they may not be able to conduct religious services outside of Altoona and select their own speakers and go around for meetings."

At Coupon Foth and Franz had started a Sunday school and were holding preaching services on Sunday

afternoons. Foth and Franz responded to the accusations of impropriety by saying that they had as much right to administer the ordinances of the church as did Shaw, since he as a deacon was not ordained and they were. Yet, Shaw had been performing marriages!

In June 1921 the board told the two women to stay in the workers' home in Altoona and stop the services at Coupon. But in August, the message was changed. The board now asked Foth to move to Coupon and work exclusively there, while Franz was to stay in Altoona.

Mission board member A.S. Shelly reported on his conversation with Foth:

*She said she thought she saw through it all, that it was not so much that the Board wants her at Coupon as that they want her away from Altoona, and she almost bitterly asked, 'Why do they want me away?' She does not realize apparently, perhaps more really than apparently, that there is any fault on her part, seeing she cultivates a consciousness of following in all things the Lord's leading.*

Board member H.P. Krehbiel wrote to the other board members, "The work cannot continue successfully with two heads. And Sister Foth cannot serve as the head of the work being a woman and not prepared for such a position as that."

Elizabeth Foth and Martha Franz refused to be separated and, in spite of a petition to the board by 169 members and friends of the Altoona church asking them to stay, Foth and Franz resigned in August 1922.

Rejected by the mission board, Foth started her own mission work in Brooklyn, New York. In a downtown tenement section, Foth formed a women's Bible class of over one hundred members, which grew into a Saturday night mission. By 1929 she had found a site for a more permanent rescue mission—the Hoyt Street Gospel Hall at 215 Hoyt Street in Brooklyn.

### Hoyt St. Hall

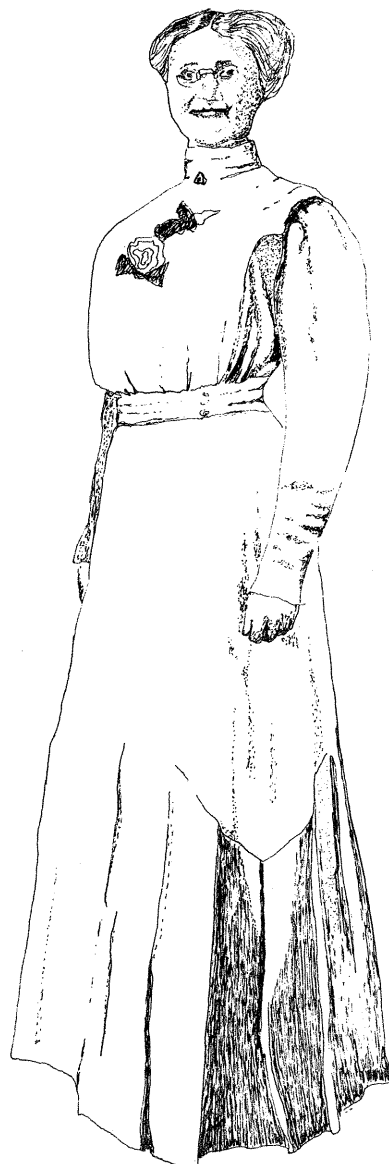
A privately published biography of Foth (Russell Kauffman, *God's Messenger to Red Hook*, 1935) devotes most of its 15 pages to description of her work at the Hoyt Street Gospel Hall, located in a tough, red-light neighborhood. According to the biography, Foth had an unshakable faith that God had brought her to that place to minister and that God would protect her, even in potentially violent situations.

*At one time, a group of half-crazed and apparently demon-possessed men who were intent on breaking up the meeting, came into the Hall. They had come from a neighboring den of the underworld which was inhabited by whites and blacks alike. The mission staff immediately began to pray for the men, and Miss Foth relates the incident, "The heavens opened and the power of God fell upon us. One of the men began to cry, 'We didn't come in here for this—we came to raise hell!' I told them that they were on their way to hell, and that unless they repented and turned to God, they would be lost forever! Soon they were calmed by the Spirit, and although they had come to scoff, they remained to listen. Some of the group later came to the altar."*

### The Detective

*One day Miss Foth felt led to visit the woman at the address given to her. When the door was opened, she was admitted by a man of gigantic proportions—a man known as a "detective." The man resided there and shared in the nefarious profits of the illicit business. When the worker entered, the door was bolted behind her, and through a hallway she was led into another room. Again the door was locked.*

*"A strange sensation crept over me," she says, "and I knew that I was locked in a room with a dangerous man. My jail work in Los Angeles had acquainted me with the perfidy of many of these so-called detectives. I realized that I was at the mercy of this man, but the word of the Lord came to me, 'If God be for you, who can be against you?' I knew that every second was precious, so I began to give my message. Suddenly the man arose and angrily stalked toward me. I got up, too, and walking toward him, I said, 'Let us pray!' I*



Elizabeth Foth

*dropped to my knees and prayed for the man. The power of God gripped his heart and I saw him literally melt before the Lord.*

*When we arose I handed him a tract and said, 'Forsake your sins and prepare to meet your God!' He meekly bowed his head and replied, 'You certainly are a virtuous woman. I did not expect this.' ...I started toward the door, and before I reached it, the man ran forward, unlocked it, and proceeded to accompany me to the lower floor.*

Six weeks later when Foth visited a woman at that house, the same man thanked Foth for the prayer on his behalf, "I needed it for I am a big sinner."

On another occasion, Foth escaped from three rough-looking men on a dark street corner by handing them a tract and witnessing to them about the need for repentance of sins.

One of the men asked her, "Aren't you afraid to be here alone at this time of night?" Foth answered, "Afraid? Why should I be afraid when the Lord is standing right here by my side? Besides, this bag is filled with dynamite!"

The man turned the gospel tract over in his hand. "What religion is this?"

"The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ," she replied. "If you believe and receive it, you can be made a new man in Christ." With the man still looking at the tract, Foth walked to the next corner to catch the streetcar with her tract case in her hand.

## **Anna Schlichting: Home Missionary to Hispanics**

*by Esther Jost*

"I was always very interested in missions, always," related Anna Schlichting as we sat in her comfortable living room decorated with brilliant hand-painted Mexican pottery. Although she had dreams of going as a missionary to either China or India, Anna was unable to get the necessary training. She was needed at home to care for her mother who was ill much of her life.

Anna Reimer was born and grew up in Oklahoma. On June 7, 1931, she was married to Arnold Schlichting, and several years later they moved to Reedley, California, where Arnold opened a chiropractic office. During World War II, after Arnold left for the service, Anna continued living in Reedley and worked in the Reedley Hospital caring for newborn babies.

Her home always was open to visiting missionaries, and when Arnold returned from the service, they remodeled the apartment to the rear of their home and called it the "Prophet's Chamber." The apartment became home to many missionaries and evangelists during their visits to Reedley. The Schlichtings' upstairs rooms were also occupied at times with missionary children and several Mexican children who needed places to live.

## **Foth's Emphases**

The message Foth preached had a fundamentalist flavor, like that of many Protestant home missionaries in the first half of this century. Foth and many other Mennonites were influenced by their education in the nondenominational Bible institutes—particularly Torrey's in Los Angeles (now Biola College) and Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Foth had attended both.

Her emphasis was on saving individual souls for the life hereafter, not as much on forming a church. In that emphasis she was following the typical rescue mission pattern. What was different about Hoyt Street Gospel Hall was that *she* was superintendent and that other missionaries or mission boards were not restricting her activities because of her gender.

Foth's work later expanded to Bible classes for Indian sailors from the San Blas Islands, who then returned from New York City to their homeland with the gospel.

Although Hoyt Street Gospel Hall had no denominational affiliation, Foth raised much of her funds from Mennonite churches. During one of Foth's fund-raising visits to a Pa. Mennonite church in 1944, A.J. Neuenschwander heard Foth and her nephew Erwin Wedel speak. Neuenschwander asked Foth whether she felt like cooperating now with the Home Mission Board, since much of her support came from Mennonites.

Foth said no.

## **Work in Parlier**

Anna and Arnold and their daughter Roberta, adopted when three and a half years old, attended the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church. Often the congregation sang, "Speed the Light." One morning in 1955 after singing the song, the pastor gave an invitation for people to stand who would be willing to begin a work with Hispanic people living in Parlier, five miles west of Reedley, where many migrant workers from Mexico were living.

"Both of us were on our feet just like that," stated Anna. "We didn't know that an invitation would be given, and we hadn't talked beforehand about volunteering our time."

The Schlichtings had worked in Parlier about six years when Arnold had several heart attacks, causing them to discontinue the work temporarily.

"I think it was the first Sunday we were home after the Parlier work, I drove down the streets of Reedley and saw so many Mexican kids running around I just couldn't stand it," said Anna.

*In Parlier when we saw children on the streets without supervision, we talked to them and invited them to Sunday school. Of course, we always went to their homes and got their mothers' permission before we took them to church with us. So I invited the children I saw on the streets of Reedley to our home for Sunday school.*



## El Faro, Orange Cove

From this beginning, more and more people including teenagers and parents came to the services until they overflowed the Schlichting home and also their yard. From this nucleus, the El Faro MB Church was started in Reedley in 1962, and the Schlichtings ministered here for several years.

In 1965 after another couple was able to take over the ministry in El Faro, Anna helped her husband begin the Orange Cove MB Church, about ten miles east of Reedley. While continuing their work in Orange Cove, the Schlichtings helped begin the Hispanic ministry in Dinuba, five miles southeast of Reedley.

In 1979 when another pastor was able to take over the ministry in Orange Cove, the Schlichtings began a ministry in Traver, California, twelve miles south of Reedley, to Hispanic people who more recently had come from Mexico.

Anna always loved children. "While in Parlier, I went to the health clinics every week and helped the county health nurse with the babies," Anna related.

*I could speak a little Spanish, so I was asked to help bring the mothers and babies to the clinic. This, also, helped me get acquainted with the mothers, so I could invite them to worship services at our church.*

## Clothes and Self-Esteem

Anna was sensitive to the Hispanic people's physical needs and also to their self-esteem.

*When people needed clothes, I would gather clothes from people willing to donate them and have a weekly rummage sale on our yard for our church people. The items were priced very low, and the church people could buy their clothes and not accept charity. This changed as the people became more established, and now the rummage sales aren't necessary any more.*

*Also, we always put on a graduation banquet for our church people. Anyone who was graduating regardless of age could attend. We'd have a big program in the church. The girls wore formals, some which I had to make and others I had collected ahead of time from the Reedley MB Church people. I was always very modest, so I bought yards and yards of lace and made a bolero for every dress and the girls were happy.*

*We had the graduation festivities the same night the schools in the area had their proms and dances. This way the graduates had a festive time without having to attend the school functions. We had a big dinner at the church, which was beautifully decorated. It was really elegant and it was one of the highlights of the year.*

## Singing and Banging Drums

During vacation Bible school, Anna sang with the children and made God's Word live through songs, flannelgraph stories and drama. Anna made costumes and dressed each child with clothes representing the Bible characters. "The kids loved it," commented Anna.

*In order to let children know about our school, our Sunday school children would make instruments. Anything that would bang—like coffee cans with*

*inner tubes laced over them were our drums. We would walk up and down the streets banging our drums and singing our little church songs. By the time we got back to the church, we had a long string of children excited about going to vacation Bible school.*

Singing was a big part of the Hispanic ministry, and the songs were sung in Spanish. "First we would sing the songs in unison," explained Anna. "Then we would take people separately to teach them part singing. Soon we had a terrific choir, and one of our choirs ministered on the radio for an extended time."

Mother's Day always was a special day for each mother who came to the church where the Schlichtings ministered. The day before Anna baked many cakes. Each mother in attendance on Mother's Day was presented one of Anna's delicious cakes.

The Schlichtings nurtured new Christians in a discipleship program. The new Christians learned to pray, studied the Bible and grew in God's Word to become mature in their Christian walk.

## 25 Years

Anna and Arnold Schlichting have been in the Hispanic ministry for more than a quarter of a century. Anna often heard her husband say, "Our job is to work ourselves out of a job." They were successful in doing this in the areas where they helped establish mission churches. Currently they are working in Traver, California.

"The work in Traver is beginning much the same way it did in Parlier more than 25 years ago," said Anna.

*We are contacting individual families and have started home Bible studies. No one speaks English, so I have an interpreter with me as I go around to various homes to contact the women to begin Bible studies.*

*For the past several Christmases that we have worked in Traver, we have had Christmas celebrations with the children putting on the drama of the Christmas story. After the service we gave treats to the children.*

The Scripture verse which is important to Anna in her ministry is Psalm 28:7: "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults and with my song I shall thank Him." Anna sings her thanks often.



Bethel Hospital

## The Mennonite Diaconate

by Katie Funk Wiebe

The older woman handed me a picture with the words, "Write something about these women sometime."

The picture lies before me. Four women stand behind an open coffin banked with flowers in which lies the body of another woman. All five wear deaconess garb: long dark tailored dresses, trimmed with broad white collar and cuffs. Long hair is tucked neatly under a fluted pill-box hat held securely by stiff white ribbons tied under the chin.

The women were members of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren training school for deaconesses associated with Salem Hospital and Home in Hillsboro, Kansas, in the 1920s.

The deaconess movement, both in American church life generally and in the Mennonite constituency, began in the late 1880s and flourished for many decades. While the best-known Mennonite training school for deaconesses was established by the General Conference Mennonites in Newton, Kansas, it was attended by women from other branches of the Mennonite church as well. Other schools were begun at Mountain Lake, Minnesota; Goessel, Kansas; and Beatrice, Nebraska.

The urge to begin specialized schools for women was based on several factors. At the turn of the century, society had many intelligent single women, highly gifted and also dedicated to Christ. Society also had many needy people. Training schools to develop women's "natural skills" together with the needs of the sick, poor and destitute.

### Phoebe as Model

Using Phoebe as their model (Rom. 16:1), leaders revived the forgotten office of deaconess and established schools for women interested in devoting their life to Christian service. In the Mennonite community, David Goerz of Newton, Kansas, pioneered to provide a motherhouse and a hospital for the women to live and work in through the Bethel Deaconess Home and Hospital Society. He patterned the school after the movement already begun in Europe and Russia by the Mennonites and Lutherans.

An unsigned article in *Mennonite Life* (January 1948) credits the Anabaptists with starting the deaconess movement in Europe. One deaconess, Elizabeth Dirks, was imprisoned and drowned in 1549. The Lutheran pastor Theodore Fliedner met the Mennonites in Holland, who had deaconesses serving the poor in their congregations.

Fliedner carried the idea from Holland to Germany, and from there it traveled to Asia, Europe, Africa and America. Virginia Lieson Brereton writes in *Women in New Worlds* that in the 1880s, the diaconate emerged



Sister Frieda Kaufman

as an important channel for service for Methodist, Episcopal and Lutheran women.

### First Deaconess Mother

Sister Frieda Kaufman, a woman of many skills, great leadership potential and inner strength, became the first deaconess mother and administrator of the Newton hospital and mother house in 1908 at the age of 25. At the same time, she, Sister Catherine Voth and Sister Ida Epp were ordained.

The appeal to "Come, taste and see what blessings lay in store for an evangelical deaconess" went out to the congregations. Christian young women and childless widows were encouraged to join the sisterhood. The general unspoken expectation was that volunteers would make a lifelong commitment, for a "deaconess is a woman serving Christ and His church, who, free from all other duties, desires to devote her time and effort to the service of the Lord in ministering to suffering humanity." The women came, expecting to become deaconess nurses, missionaries or pastors' assistants.

A young woman was accepted on probation for several months, then invested with the deaconess garb at a special service. After four or five years, if she was still convinced of God's leading, she was ordained at a public gathering, an event celebrated at significant intervals thereafter.

Vows included celibacy, poverty and obedience for as long as the woman felt the diaconate was her place of service. The women accepted the call because it was a challenge.

### Deaconess Motto

The deaconess motto reads:

*What is my desire? My desire is to serve. Whom do I desire to serve? The Lord Jesus in His poor and suffer-*



ing ones. *And what is my reward?* I serve neither for reward nor for praise, but in gratitude and love. My reward is that I am permitted to serve....

The female diaconate trained women for a full-time church-related career, often impossible in the early 1920s and '30s without some institutional support. The students learned nursing care, Bible study and history of the deaconess movement. They also did practical work in the hospital. Holistic health care was important. A spiritual ministry to patients was emphasized.

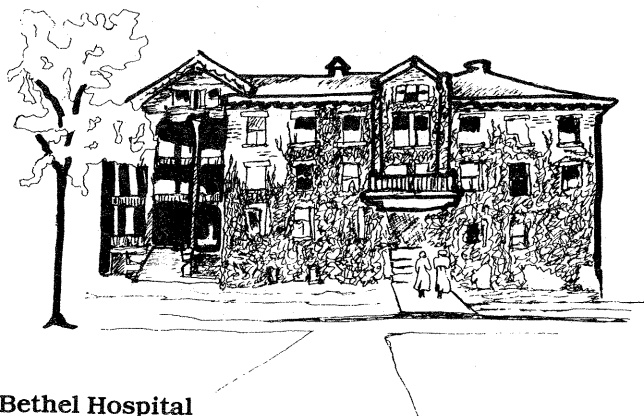
The diaconate promised the women lifetime support, but also blessed their ministry with ordination. The church recognized that the women had subordinated themselves to the order of Christ and also acknowledged their right and privilege to function religiously in their home country. By 1948 the Newton society was responsible for a 100-bed hospital, two deaconess homes, a school and dormitory for student nurses, a home for the aged and 28 deaconesses. About 30 missionaries had received their training there.

In my book *Our Lamps Were Lit: An Informal History of the Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing*, I explain briefly how the deaconess movement in Newton changed to become a nursing school. Training schools of other denominations in America generally merged with other educational institutions and ceased by the late 1940s.

### Concept Dropped

Mary Agnes Dougherty in *Women in New Worlds* writes that, in time, experience and dedication were valued less than credentials. Society expected higher standards of its professionals. Institutions such as seminaries and colleges took over some of the course work, such as Bible study. Then, as men took over leadership and control of the curricula, the concept of the female diaconate was dropped. Financial problems and an unwillingness to change with the times were additional factors in the demise of the deaconess movement.

The picture before me reminds me of one important truth: the deaconess movement developed when the church emphasized women's spiritual responsibilities



Bethel Hospital

in the church. Some leaders were concerned that women be given a place of service. They saw the need and the means to meet that need through that large group of single women who wanted a place of service but were powerless to make the openings for themselves.

After World War II, when enlisted men returned and women were encouraged to leave their factory jobs and other types of work in the public sector and return to the private sphere, the church emphasized limitations on women's church-related service and urged them to return to the domestic arena.

Only today are historians recognizing the significant contribution of this movement to Christian education and to meeting the church's social responsibilities. And, of course, to women's development.

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## News and Verbs

In their Nov. 4-5 meeting, the Mennonite Church Board of Congregational Ministries welcomed **Charlotte Holsopple Glick**, Goshen, IN; **Martha Smith Good**, New Hamburg, ON; and **Victor Mojica**, Goshen, IN as new members of the board. New members elected to the Mennonite Board of Education are **Maria Magdalena V. DeLeon**, Mathis, TX; **Sue Clemmer Steiner**, Waterloo, ON; and **Faith Landis Wenger**, Fresno, CA.

**Miriam Krantz**, nutritionist in Nepal since 1963, received the \$20,000 Robert W. Pierce Award from World Vision for her work without much recognition on the front lines of Christian service overseas.

**Esther Epp-Tiessen**, MCC worker in the Philippines, reports that an all women's march for justice and freedom was slated for Oct. 28. Organizers expected 20,000 women to take part.

The Church of the Brethren Women's Caucus is sponsoring a conference for women, men and children on "As the World Turns: Feminism and Nonviolence" at Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA, May 25-27, 1984. General session leaders include Church of the Brethren World Ministries staff **Shantilal Bhagat**, Central American refugee worker **Yvonne Dilling**, **Melanie May** of Harvard Divinity School, **Andrea Warnke**, and **June Alliman Yoder** (1982-83 C.H. Smith Peace Lecturer). For registration info call (703) 350-2922.

**Charlotte Kroeker**, Ph.D., has been named chairperson of the Humanities Division at Tabor College in Hillsboro, KS.

**I Can Make Peace**, a record album of stories and songs for children about making peace, was released in December by MCC. For children K-4, the record explores backyard peacemaking, learning to forgive, peacemaking in the family, loving your enemies and peacemaking in time of fear and war. Price is \$7.95 U.S. or \$9.55 Canadian. Also available on cassette tape.

**Gloria Martin Eby**, West Montrose, ON, becomes the first full-time Dean of Students at Conrad Grebel

College, Waterloo, ON on May 1, 1984. **Gloria** retired as chairperson of Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries last summer.

**Bread for the World**, a U.S. Christian citizens' movement that works on public policy issues affecting hungry people, is seeking persons to participate in the 1984 Summer Organizing Project, June 10 through August 15. Participants attend a 10-day orientation in Washington, D.C., then are placed with a local working group anywhere in the U.S. For more info contact **Sharon Pauling**, BFW, 802 Rhode Island Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20018 (202) 269-0200.

MCC workers **Peg Short** and **Barb Thuma** teach classes for women in gardening and food preparation at the Buurdhubo Refugee Camp (run by the United Nations) in Somalia. The refugee women from Ethiopia must learn to grow and prepare new foods as a result of their uprooting. These new foods include sweet potatoes, pumpkin, okra, onions, green peppers and tomatoes.

**Eunice Sowazi**, general secretary for the Council of Swaziland Churches, visited MCC Akron in November as part of a North American church familiarization trip. She is the first woman in Africa to hold this type of position in the church.

This year, women outnumber men in the master's program at **Harvard Divinity School**. The percentage of female students at U.S. and Canadian divinity schools is now 23.7, compared with 10% a decade ago.

The WMSC (Mennonite Church) devotional guide for Jan./Feb./Mar./Apr. 1984 takes the form of a four-part study guide to *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness* by **Elaine Sommers Rich**. Author of the devotional guide is **Thelma Miller Groff**. It is printed in the December 1983 issue of the *WMSC Voice*.

**Ruth McCaslin**, MCC worker in Nepal, has been building and promoting the use of solar dryers during 1983. In the future she hopes to teach the making of "churpie," a Tibetan-style hard cheese made with buttermilk; she also wants to explore the feasibility of making rugs and clothing from "alloe," a high altitude stinging nettle.

The Alban Institute, Washington, D.C., is sponsoring an "Ordained Women in Ministry II" conference May 21-23, 1984. Leaders are **Roy M. Oswald** and **Linda Kramer**. It will explore issues such as: What changes take place in lay people when their religious authority is a woman? How do women clergy experience the first 12 to 18 months of ministry in a parish? For more info write **Linda Kramer**, The Alban Institute, Mount St. Alban, Washington, D.C. 20016.

At its December 1983 meeting the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns adopted these guidelines for printing "Letters to the Editor" in *Report*: 1) the editor has the freedom to be selective in printing letters or parts of letters; 2) the editor should send a copy of letters pertaining to a specific article to the author of that article, so he/she can respond directly; 3) anonymous letters will not be printed, but names of authors will be

withheld by request; 4) space should be limited to direct responses to articles, and not used for responses to letters printed previously.

**Dr. Lucille Mair**, a native of Jamaica, was keynote speaker at a "Women and Health" conference held in New York in November, sponsored by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. A major purpose, according to planner **Cathie Lyons**, was to identify the most important women's health issues, so that when the UN Decade for Women ends in 1985, the church can continue to work in the area of women's health. Participants spoke of circumcisions of girls in northern Africa, of bride burnings in India, and of the "valiumization" of older women in the U.S. (From a report in the Nov. 13, 1983 *New York Times*).

**Delphine Martin**, Waterloo, ON, is director of the newly-opened Shalom Counseling Service branch in Waterloo. **Delphine** has completed advanced training at Interfaith Pastoral Counseling Centre in Kitchener, and is a former youth minister with the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec.

**The Rev. Carol Joyce Brun** was elected Secretary of the United Church of Christ denomination at its 14th General Synod meeting last summer. This is the highest post achieved by any woman in a mainline Protestant denomination in the U.S. to date. "I am awed by the role...with all that implies," said Brun, "being in the spotlight, providing leadership on matters of faith and polity, and listening to and representing all the diversity that makes up the UCC." (From a report in Sept. 1983 *Common Lot*.)

Replacements are needed for **Karen Neufeld**, Mennonite Brethren U.S. woman on the Committee on Women's Concerns, and for **Esther Wiens**, M.B. Canadian woman member of the committee. Both of their terms end this summer. To suggest names or for more info, write **Linda Schmidt**, MCC, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501.

At its December meeting, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee of MCC Canada approved the hiring of a Canadian woman on a half-time VS basis for two years "to further the cause of women's concerns in Canada." More info next time.

*Weaving Wisdom: Sermons by Mennonite Women*, edited by **Dorothy Yoder Nyce**; and *Mennonite Women's Calendar 1984-86*, with **Christine Kaufmann** and **Priscilla Stuckey Kauffman** as project coordinators, can still be ordered from Dorothy Yoder Nyce, 1603 S. 15th St., Goshen, IN 46526. Cost: \$4 per calendar, \$5 per book, plus 75¢ postage each.

The General Executive Committee of the Women's Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC) of the Mennonite Church has co-opted **Miriam Book** for two years as the first career/professional women's secretary. Miriam, president of the Lancaster WMSC, recruitment officer and administrative assistant for Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions, says, "Over the years

WMSC has worked at areas of service and family life that related to the woman in the home, and now it wants to discover the thoughts, desires and needs of the career/professional woman to strengthen her as well." In her role Miriam will contact the WMSCs of all the conferences as well as talk with women who may not consider themselves a part of WMSC. She solicits thoughts from interested persons, and can be contacted at 2523 Cherry Lane, Ronks, PA 17572. (*Lancaster Conference News*, Dec. 11, 1983)

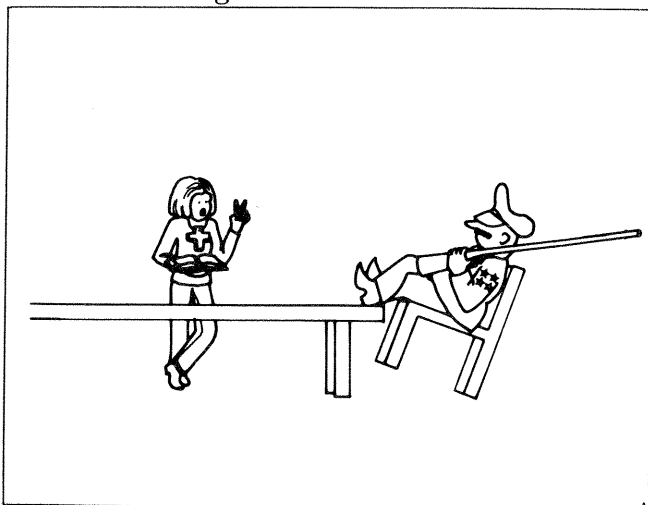
**March 8, 1984** is International Women's Day. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and other groups are planning a gathering of women to converge at the United States capitol building to urge an end to the arms race and call for a redirection of national values and priorities.

Position opening: Administrative Assistant in MCC U.S. Peace Section. Main tasks include staffwork for the Committee on Women's Concerns and for military tax concerns. Two-year term, voluntary service basis, beginning June 1984. Contact MCC Personnel Services, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501, to apply.

**Donella Clemens**, Souderton, PA, was recently elected as the Secretary of the Franconia Conference Nurture Commission. She is the first woman to serve in this position.

**Joyce Hedrick**, Lederach, PA has accepted assignment to an interim administrative team for the Franconia Conference Mission Commission. Luke Martin and James Longacre are the other members of the interim team. A full-time Secretary for Missions is being sought.

**Lois Kenagy**, Corvallis, OR, participated in the first tour of Oregon women to Nicaragua last September. The tour was sponsored by the Eugene (OR) Council on Human Rights in Latin America. In Nicaragua, the 14-member group was hosted by the official organization of women—AMNLAE. Lois urges persons to write to public officials about the impact of U.S. policy and CIA actions in Nicaragua.



If you have news and verbs that you would like to share with the other 2,000 readers of *Report*, send them to Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

## NCC's Inclusive Lectionary

"An Inclusive Language Lectionary, Readings for Year A," was unveiled this fall by the Div. of Education and Ministry of the National Council of Churches and is creating quite a media stir.

Its reading of Scripture passages takes off from the RSV but avoids terms such as "man" or "men" when they mean "a person" or "people." It has also added to the text in some cases—for instance, "the faith of Abraham" becomes "the faith of Abraham and Sarah."

Its most controversial changes have to do with language referring to Deity. "Sovereign" is used rather than "Lord" or "King"; Christ is called the "Child of God" rather than "Son of God." God as "Father" becomes "(God) the Father (and Mother)."

Promotional brochures for the lectionary emphasize that it "is an experiment...(which) offers your congregation a choice." *Christianity Today* calls it "a bisexual nightmare" (Nov. 11/83, p. 50).

In an article in *The Christian Century*, **Jean Caffey Lyles** sees the lectionary as "an effort to enable a fresh hearing of Scripture," similar in that sense to productions such as J.B. Phillips' *The New Testament in Modern English*, Kenneth Taylor's *The Living Bible*, or Clarence Jordan's *Cotton Patch Version of the Gospels*. Her critique includes the observation that although this version is meant for reading in public worship, some of the constructions used to avoid sexist language are quite awkward and convoluted, and thus not at all easy to listen to. (Dec. 14, 1983, pgs. 1148-1150).

**Caffey** and other commentators also ask: is it appropriate to attempt to deal with the sexism of our day by trying to "revise the history and rub out the uncomfortable parts?" Lectionary committee member **Virginia Ramey Mollenkott** argues that given the way the language we use shapes our reality, we must make this kind of effort. "If God is always manlike, never womanlike," she is quoted as saying in *Christianity Today*, "then men are godlike and women are not."

Concerning the awkward constructions, **Mollenkott** asks, "Are Christians ready to endure linguistic discomfort for the sake of clarifying the inclusiveness of the gospel?" (CC, Dec. 14/83).

The debate will rage for some time to come. —report compiled by scs

(Interested persons may order the lectionary from The Westminster Press, P.O. Box 718, William Penn Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19105. Cost is \$7.95 U.S. plus postage and handling.)

## **Your Help is Needed... To Bring Third World Women to Mennonite World Conference**

The Mennonite World Conference Travel Fund goal is \$100,000 to subsidize the expenses of 125 persons. Those already designated to receive funds include General Council members from the Third World and a choir from Zaire. Most of these persons happen to be men.

MWC officials have agreed to accept funds designated for **Third World Women**; they will ensure that the number of women equivalent to the amount of these "designated funds" will be included in the group of 125. Please note that no **separate** fund exists for Third World Women. When you send a contribution, mark your check clearly "MWC Travel Fund, designated for Third World Women."

In 1978 over \$10,000 was raised and 16 women were able to participate in MWC in Wichita. Can we do as well or better in 1984?

Please send your check or money order to:  
Mennonite World Conference  
528 E. Madison St.  
Lombard, IL 60148

## **Letter**

I am interested in receiving a copy of your *Women's Concerns Report*. It was mentioned to me by another female clergy as something that she has found to be very helpful.

My husband and I are a clergy couple within the Evangelical Covenant Church. As part of my Doctor of Ministry program, I am writing a working paper on clergy couples for our denomination.

Sincerely,  
Carol Nordstrom, Siren Covenant Church,  
Siren, Wisconsin



Forthcoming *Reports* will focus on:  
March-Apr. 1984 Women and Third World Development  
May-June 1984 Impact of Childbearing/Childlessness on Women's Lives  
July-Aug. 1984 Friendship and Community  
Sept.-Oct. 1984 Women and Poverty  
Nov.-Dec. 1984 Women and Body Image

The *REPORT* is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The Committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

To subscribe or change your address, please send your old address with your new address to: MCC, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501. Allow 2-4 weeks for address change. Contributions welcome.

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